



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

October 28, 2021

Mr. Douglas P. Ray  
Senior Assistant City Attorney  
City of Houston  
P.O. Box 368  
Houston, Texas 77001-0368

OR2021-29852

Dear Mr. Ray:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 912884 (GQA Reference No. D000624).

The City of Houston (the "city") received a request for records pertaining to 3-1-1 calls regarding two specified addresses during a defined period of time. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses information protected by the common-law informer's privilege, which has long been recognized by Texas courts. *See Aguilar v. State*, 444 S.W.2d 935, 937 (Tex. Crim. App. 1969); *Hawthorne v. State*, 10 S.W.2d 724, 725 (Tex. Crim. App. 1928). The privilege protects from disclosure the identities of persons who report activities over which the governmental body has criminal or quasi-criminal law enforcement authority, provided the subject of the information does not already know the informer's identity. Open Records Decision Nos. 515 at 3 (1988), 208 at 1-2 (1978). The privilege protects the identities of individuals who report violations of statutes to the police or similar law-enforcement agencies, as well as those who report violations of statutes with civil or criminal penalties to "administrative officials having a duty of inspection or of law enforcement within their particular spheres." Open Records Decision No. 279 at 2 (1981) (citing 8 John H. Wigmore, *Evidence in Trials at Common Law*, § 2374, at 767 (J. McNaughton rev. ed. 1961)). The report must be of a violation of a criminal or civil statute. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 582 at (1990), 515 at 4-5. The privilege excepts the

informer's statement only to the extent necessary to protect that informer's identity. Open Records Decision No. 549 at 5 (1990). We note the privilege is not intended to protect the identities of public officials and employees who have a duty to report violations of the law. Because a public employee acts within the scope of his employment when filing a complaint, the informer's privilege does not protect the public employee's identity. *Cf. United States v. St. Regis Paper Co.*, 328 F.Supp. 600, 665 (W.D. Wis. 1971) (concluding public officer may not claim informer's reward for service if it is his or her official duty to perform).

You state the submitted information identifies complainants who reported possible violations of section 10-552 of the city's Code of Ordinances to the city's police department (the "department"). We understand the department is responsible for enforcing the relevant portions of the city codes. You also state a violation of the relevant city ordinance is punishable by a fine. Based upon your representations and our review, we conclude the city has demonstrated the applicability of the common-law informer's privilege to some of the information at issue. Thus, the city may withhold the information we marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege. However, we find the city has failed to demonstrate the remaining information at issue identifies a complainant for purposes of the informer's privilege. Therefore, the city may not withhold any of the remaining information at issue under section 552.101 on that basis. As no further exceptions to disclosure have been raised, the city must release the remaining information.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open-government/members-public/what-expect-after-ruling-issued> or call the OAG's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Public Information Act may be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the OAG, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

Kimbell Kesling  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

KK/jm

Ref: ID# 912884

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)